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ABSTRACT

The paper outlines the basic tactics in pro-active behavior management, a behavior modification approach for use with severely handicapped students which reorders the staff/student relationship by focusing on positive interaction. Pro-active behavior management is noted to involve interruption of established behavior chains, environmental rearrangement, redirection, development of competing behaviors, and maximizing positive reinforcement. An example of the pro-active implementation sequence is given. (SBH)

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PRO-ACTIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

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PRO ACTIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

Behavior modification, probably more than any other instructional technique, by demonstrating that the behavior of severely handicapped students can be changed significantly, has provided the basis for the inclusion of these students into the educational arena. Yet, despite success, significant ethical and moral questions continue to surround the use of behavior modification (Martin 1975, Scottword 1975). Nonetheless, neither unending debates or philosophical stonewalling, have significantly affected the use of behavior modification. Now, however, behavior modification techniques are coming under siege from a new direction. Increasing legal scrutiny (Martin 1975) is resulting in a trend that is significantly affecting the application of behavior modification techniques.

Behavior modification has not been singled out for investigation, rather it has been caught up in a growing legal examination of all human service programs. After years of observing a "hands off" policy, courts are prescribing a narrower definition of administrative discretion and making decisions that profoundly affect the way human service agencies can go about attempting to change behavior. The origin of these changes has been an increased vigilance with regard to due process and equal protection, as well as slow evolution of the series of common law cases relating to handicapped individuals.

The increased legal concern with behavior modification is not without its irony. The early work of behaviorists provided much of the empirical evidence required by civil libertarians to substantiate their cases. There

is considerable similarity in philosophies of behaviorists and civil libertarians. Both are attempting to free individuals from constraints, both deal only with overt behavior and both look to the environment rather than the individual for causation factors. Strangely, it is these very attributes that make behavior modification a natural target for legal action. No other behavior changing technique is so succinct about its goals, techniques and expected outcomes. Its very measurability allows civil libertarians to apply their standards more precisely to behavior modification than to any of the more rhetoric-oriented therapies.

Regardless of the irony, future court decisions probably will result in an even more stringent review of behavior modification programs. Initial cases (Morales v. Turman 1974, Wyatt v. Stickney 1972) indicate that the procedures likely to receive the most intensive review are those commonly grouped as "behavior management". The major reasons for challenging these techniques are that they are often punitive in nature, and society currently is extremely sensitive to the application of any sanctions without stringent protection of due process. Also, outrageous abuses have occurred under the guise of behavior modification; these aberrations have incited the public to demand increased regulations.

To many practitioners, legal complications only to represent another reason for avoiding punitive behavior management techniques. These individuals long have held that despite initial success, these procedures, at best, may result in only the behavior's temporary disappearance. Unfortunately,

they do not foster the establishment of the competing behavior necessary to provide the basis for the permanent elimination of target behaviors (Skinner 1953). At worst, these reactive procedures are a time consuming and counter-productive, especially considering the aversive side effects that often accompany their implementation (Skinner 1953).

Reactive behavior management procedures frequently produce a "what to do when someone does something wrong" mind set. As a result, observations, meetings and informal discussions concentrate disproportionately on what action to take when the student exhibits an inappropriate behavior. Consequently, planning for and implementation of skill acquisition activities often take a secondary position or are totally ignored. Staff time is devoted to finding more effective and, generally, more physical ways of eliminating the targeted behavior. Most people are only able to cope with such a negative, punishment agent orientation for a short period before their morale begins to deteriorate with a resulting increase in staff dissention and turnover.

The pressures of legal sanctions and the demand for more positive interaction require a reorientation of approaches for coping with inappropriate behavior. Everything possible should be done to avoid punitive response if they absolutely are necessary, each step in the management procedure must be carefully documented to assure due process protection.

Fundamental to any new approach is the understanding that disruptive or inappropriate behavior generally is related to attention seeking, skill deficiency or self stimulation and that any reactionary behavior only feeds the attention seeking, condemns the student for not exhibiting skills not taught, or demands that the student not be bored by an unstimulating environ-

ment. A punitive approach represents a reaction to the behavior rather than an understanding of the conditions reponsible for the behavior. Reactionary behavior does not change any of the conditions, it only causes a constantly growing concentration of staff energy on counter-productive activities.

To implement a more positive approach the staff must concentrate on replacing reactive thinking with pro-active thinking. This requires a change in attitude and the acquisition of new skills. Avoiding punitive responses requires a radical philosophical reorientation for many teachers. For centuries, teachers have been taught that a correcting interaction must follow any inappropriate behaivor, to ignore such a behavior would be to neglect a teacher's responsibilities. This approach is based on the belief that student growth is not possible without significant teacher intervention. Unfortunately, this belief is founded on common sense, personal experience and plausible argument rather than empirical evidence (Dunkin & Biddle 1972). Some research (Barrett 1971, Madsen et al, 1968) actually indicates that extensive teacher/student interaction actually can inhibit skill acquisition.

To break the downward "no win" spiral, it is necessary to reorder the staff/student relationship by focusing on positive interaction. Staff/student interactions myst become pro-active, that is, designed to prevent rather than to react, This approach requires the acknowledgement that the responsibility for inappropriate behavior falls on the environment, not the student.

The basic tactics in pro-active behavior management involve:

* interruption of established behavior chains - most disruptive behavior is predictable if the teacher is aware of the behavior chain that cumulminates in the inappropriate behavior. Frequently there are distinctive antecedent behaviors that should key the teacher to action. Once the teacher observes any antecedent event, the course of action should be to interrupt the chain and re-direct the student to another activity or assist the student through the situation. The teacher should assure that the student has stabilized in the new activity and then move away.

* environmental re-arrangement - it frequency is possible to reduce the probability of a behavior occuring by re-arranging the physical environment. Sometimes the environment may be arranged to elicit the behavior but to reduce the probability of the behavior being rewarded. The environment also can be re-arranged to elicit and reward behaviors incompatable with the inappropriate behavior.

* re-direction - if the behavior does occur, it should be ignored (if possible) and the student should be directed immediately to a positive activity and reinforced. The teacher should work at the new activity until the student's behavior has stabilized.

* develop competing behaviors - the implementation of a training sequence designed to develop competing behavior should begin as soon as a inappropriate behavior is identified as requiring staff attention. The objective of the training sequence should be to help the student develop a behavior chain that is a more appropriate reaction to the stimulus situation.

* maximize positive reinforcement - all appropriate behavior should receive some sort of positive reinforcement. A student with objectives relating to the deceleration of behaviors should be reinforced for all appropriate behavior. During the attempt to decelerate a behavior positive reinforcement schedules should not be manipulated.

The implementation of pro-active behavior management requires the development of procedures that reduce the need for reactive behavior management. The process, detailed in Tables 1 and 2, involves meetings, observation, identification of specific training procedures and regular monitoring.

At the first meeting, the target behavior should be defined and any procedures currently being used to eliminate it identified. At the same time, an observation schedule should be established for the collection of baseline data. The data collected during the obse-vation period should be discussed at a second meeting and decisions should be made on whether any new interventions would be appropriate. If an alternative intervention seems necessary, the procedure should be developed along with the monitoring schedule. The procedures then should be implemented and a follow-up meeting scheduled to evaluate the data and make appropriate procedural modifications.

Although the pro-active procedure can be used with most disruptive behaviors, there may be certain behaviors (biting, stripping, self-abuse, etc.) or situations that unfortunately require a direct intervention. Whenever possible, the intervention used should be the minimum needed to re-establish the equilibrium of the situation. Again, these reactions can become reinforcing because of the required staff/student interaction. To determine if this is occurring, data should be collected carefully when using these procedures. For example, if time out or activity less does not result in a decrease of the target behavior within three to five uses, it is likely that the lost event is not really important to the student.

TABLE 2

An Example of the Pro-Active Implementation Sequence

1st Meeting:

1. Define the disruptive behavior - the student when walking independently from ward to classroom and the reverse, runs to gargabe can and eats garbage.

2. Determine and define competing behavior(s) - the student will walk independently from ward to classroom and reverse without going to the gargabe can.

3. List contingencies currently applied - the student is removed from the garbage can, food is removed from mouth, student is timed out in classroom corner for three minutes. Often student bites staff who is removing food from mouth (see procedures for biting).

4. Determine when and who will observe - staff responsible for student in ward will record each incident when student is going from ward to classroom Staff responsible for student in classroom will record each incident when student goes from classroom to ward. Data will be collected from Monday the 10th through Friday the 14th.

Observation Period:

The data collected indicated that every time the student went from the ward to the classroom, and the reverse, he ran to the garbage can and attempted to eat. The time out procedure was systematically applied after each incident. During the observation period the student bit the staff attempting to remove food from his mouth five times.

2nd Meeting:

1. Does behavior occur frequently enough to require systematic attention - yes.

2. What are the apparent reasons for the behavior - this is not clear but it appears to be a combination of attention seeking and hunger.

3. Action - a. tie the cover on the garbage can prior to the student traveling in the hall.
   b. ignore attempts by the student to remove garbage can cover.
   c. implement a training program where the student gets a reward for traveling directly to appropriate location (see standard fading sequence).
   d. request metabolic tests.

4. Data Collection - data will be collected on this procedure for one week on the standard behavior management data collection form.

None of these direct intervention procedures should ever be used in isolation, rather, they should be used in combination with pro-active procedures. To assist in implementation, data collection and procedure evaluation, a record (Table 3) should be completed for each targeted behavior and made available to all staff. All staff should be familiar with each procedure and should be able to accurately and safely implement the procedures.

TABLE 3

Behavior Management Procedures Record

name	behavior	antecedent	preventive	reactive	competing
John	toy throwing	if you leave him alone with toys	take toys when you leave	ignore	teaching to play with toys alone for extending period
Sue	biting	attention seeking in group activities; when its not turn	talk to her at least once every 30 sec.	lose activity	teaching more skills so can work independently in group.

Conclusion:

A pro-active approach initially requires considerable time committment for introducing new intervention methods and planning activities; however, in the long run, it can result in a sigificant decrease in time devoted to reacting to inappropriate behavior. More important, it can change the atmosphere of the learning environment from counterproductive confrontation to constructive cooperation.

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